

# This Old House

21  
smart  
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boosts

## fresh ideas

### FOR EVERY ROOM—AND BUDGET

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home

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WORTH THE PURCHASE? EXPERTS AGREE  
MARCH 2014

## Fresh ideas

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All kinds of perfect home, a featured makeover making you see us. Follow the story.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE DESIGNER; STYLING: JANE BAKER



Cover Photos by LISA B. WOOD  
Styling by MARIE L. GIBSON

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## Letter FROM THIS OLD HOUSE

### Send us your selfies!

It's that time of year. The time when you gaze send us your tips, ideas, essays, and project photos for our annual reader contest. And send you do, but your year passed over more than 30,000 photos and the search for America's Best Remodel, the year's centerpiece. It's a lot of work for us, looking at your work, but it results, I think, in *The Old House's* best issue of the year—our favorites.

Yes, there will be one big winner who gets the eight-page feature story, and there will be five runners-up, and they'll all get a modest amount of cash. But, in the end, we'd like to think that everyone who contributes to *TOH's* reader-creation is a home-improvement hero.

And still every year, when we select our favorite wins, we're asked, "Exactly what makes a remodel America's best?"

Well, I can tell you this: It isn't what went into the renovation of the \$114 million townhouse I saw in *The New York Times* the other day. I mean, anyone can do a remodel like that. If you have \$114 million dollars. And a team for toilets, balconies, and rub hand-carved from single blocks of Italian marble. Not that people should have that taste. Mostly it's... *durability*.

But when last money ever stopped someone from making what could have been a best remodel the worst remodel? That's why, I guess, I'd answer the question above by saying that dollars definitely isn't the up criteria when we choose *America's Best Remodel*.

This won't come as a surprise to our regular readers, but *TOH* isn't really about your ego—it's about home and family and the desire to do right by both. And so, to us, a best remodel has a little bit of the soul of its owners behind every wall and on every piece of trim. It has heart in every finished surface and installed fixture. The best remodel has sweat equity, maybe a drop of blood, a tear or two or more, some help perhaps from Mom or Dad or a handy uncle or brother, and definitely not an angry toilet bowl.

I mean, I suppose it could have an angry toilet bowl, too, but Mom would have had to do the carving, Dad the polishing, Bro would have cradled into that corner point, and Sis would have lived all over it after smacking her thumb with a hammer.

Heart and soul and a more-than-decent job by very decent people is what we're looking for, and last year we got thousands of entries. Could your remodel be a winner? Let's find out. Email your project to [theoldhousecontest@TOH.com](mailto:theoldhousecontest@TOH.com).



The editor and the 2013 Reader Remodel Contest winners, the Webbs family.



### Interactive entry

Oh, by the way, you can

enter the contest from our website or by using the *Blipper* app to scan any page where you see the little smartphone logo above. That includes the one on this page. Using your handheld, you'll also be able to take video tours of past winners, rate the competition, and share your favorite finds with the *TOH* community.

Scott Gillette, Editor  
[scott@theoldhouse.com](mailto:scott@theoldhouse.com)



# Checklist

MARCH 2014

*Easy ways to  
improve your home  
right now*

## 6 FAST FIXES

**□ Clean out your gutters.** Before spring rains, make sure the weight of snow and ice hasn't cracked or detached your gutters, then clear any debris that may cause clogs.



**□ Tune up your fridge.** Use a fridge thermometer (about \$5) to ensure that it's running at safe temps—35 to 38 degrees—then clean the door seals to prevent energy growth.

**□ Trim broken branches.** Snow and ice storms can make even a branch bend and break. Prune injured limbs to help them heal.

**□ Replace batteries.** After turning clocks forward on March 9, remember to replace the bathroom smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

**□ Dust lightbulbs.** Wiping them with a microfiber cloth can increase your home's brightness by up to 20 percent.

**□ Check your basement.** Dampness can cause mold rot, and other issues, so look for signs of moisture: cracks or leaks in basement walls. A dehumidifier can help with mild moisture problems, but if they persist, consult a pro.

## Take note of forsythia blooms

The forsythia's bright yellow flowers appear even before its leaves, making them one of the first signs of spring—and a useful timer for gardening tasks. When you see petals appear, move old growth from your lawn to give new grass a jump start, then hit bare garden beds to help prevent cool-season weed seeds from sprouting. When forsythia is in full bloom, it's time to prune your roses and plant cool-season edibles, such as peas.



## Clean safely

Get in the spirit of National Poison Prevention Week (March 16–22) with no spring-cleaning practices. When using chemical cleaners, wear gloves and protective eyewear and open a window or turn on a fan to allow air to circulate. And always store leftover chemicals in the original containers. For more safety tips, visit [poisonprevention.org](http://poisonprevention.org).

**□ Get out your garden tools.** Planting time is almost here, and your trusty shovels need a little TLC before they can be ready for the growing season. Use sandpaper to clean away rust, then condition metal with a penetrating oil like WD-40 to prevent future corrosion. Sharpen any blades using a metal file, working in line with the tool's existing edge.



## Look for lawn pests

Now that the snow has melted, you can see any damage caused by voles over the winter. Commonly called meadow or field mice, voles are found in most lawns and they can destroy parts of your lawn by eating away the grass and creating a path by traveling between burrows. Rake up dead material before mowing so that grass can take hold before weeds die, and place traps along runways to catch still-active critters.



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## The Search for America's Best Remodel 2014

*has begun!*

Upload photos of your whole-house, yard, kitchen, bath, or other room makeover for a chance at \$10,000 in cash prizes.

Go to [thisoldhouse.com/yourTOH](http://thisoldhouse.com/yourTOH) for the entry form or to see all the reader entries from this year and last.

### REMODEL CONTEST

**Take great contest photos**  
Get top tips from TOH editors on how to take magazine-worthy pictures of your house and your garden at [thisoldhouse.com/mar2014](http://thisoldhouse.com/mar2014)

### FEATURED VIDEO

**Our favorite remodel of 2013**  
Thank your home could win the top prize in our Search for America's Best Remodel? Check out the house and family that won last year's competition at [thisoldhouse.com/mar2014](http://thisoldhouse.com/mar2014)



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# home solutions

Edited by Michelle Brunner

INSIDE 10 USES LANDSCAPING EASY UPGRADES HEALTHY HOME MORE



## Wall art with a sense of place

Large scale art provides an impressive focal point in a room, but it often comes with an equally impressive price tag. Framing a map is a quick way to add color and a personal touch, choose a map that reflects your travels or serves as a reminder of a destination down the road. To save on the cost of framing, divide the map into sections that fit standard size frames (the 16-by-24-inch ones here are \$6 each at Target.com). Arrange the sections to reflect the shape of the land mass for a unique gallery-style installation. The result: a well-traveled look for very little cost.



## Toothpicks

These tiny wood sticks can be a giant help around the house. Here, some unexpected ways to put them to use

**1- Fill a nail hole.** That toothpick is a small dowel. Insert one coated in glue into the hole. Snap off the end and flush with the rest of the piece, and stain or paint as needed.

**2- Free up a nozzle.** Use a toothpick to pry the clogged opening of a hose.

**3- Keep cutworms away.** Place three toothpicks closely around the base of a seedling and push them halfway into the soil. They will help deter these pesky caterpillars from snipping themselves around young stems and destroying them.



**4- Touch up paint.** Dip the end of a toothpick in white paint and use it to clean between the buttons of your remote control. A 2012 study found that the remote is one of the grimeiest things in your home. While you're at it, clean your cellphone, too.

**5- Mark the end of a roll of tape.** Wrap the last inch of a roll of tape around a toothpick before storing so that you're not left searching for that hard-to-find end.

**6- Create a distressed paint finish.** Drag the end of a toothpick back and forth over a just-painted wall surface to get an aged look.



slips when they are 12 to 12 inches long; put them in water until they grow roots, then plant.

**9- Fix broken eyeglasses.** In lieu of a lost screw, plug the hole with a toothpick to buy time before getting them fixed. Just cut off the excess so that you don't stab yourself.

**10- Light a candle.** When a standard match

isn't quite long enough to reach the wick in a jar candle, use a toothpick. The wood burns a bit slower, so the risk of burning your fingers is lower.

**MORE IDEAS**  
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## Panels with personality

A simply stenciled panel can add architectural character to a plain wall—and an extra dose of color and pattern. This one is on wall recess, as shown here, to turn an odd space into something special. Or use two panels to flank a focal point, such as a fireplace or built-in shelves, to lend them significance to a space. Choose a stenciled shade for the color block (we used Chalkboard's Quiet Kneel) and a contrasting shade (Oleander's Pure White) for the large-scale floral. You'll find clearer designs in our *Stylish Solutions* issue, starting at \$30. Use a rubbing tool on your panel to achieve a pattern with distressed edges. There you have it: an instant statement wall, as requested.



## Safer smell chasers

The air inside your home can be two to 100 times more polluted than what's outside, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. And chemical air fresheners only add to the haze. For healthier ways to get rid of common odors, try these tips from green-cleaning expert Leslie Reichert.



**LINGERING FISHY AROMA**  
If your kitchen smells like the grilled salmon you cooked hours before, try this: In a bowl, mix 2 cups water, add 2 or 3 tablespoons of baking soda, and less in a separate bowl. As a preventative measure while cooking, burn an all-natural candle like Fresh Wicks (\$16; freshwicks.com)—never chills below 50°F.



**STINKY GARBAGE CAN**  
Rotting foods in a canister is bad enough. But if you also place it in the kitchen, the offending trash can smells like a bomb. To keep your trash can from smelling like a bomb, place it in the bathroom. Close with a lid to keep it out of the bathroom. Or, if you can't move it, add a few drops of hydrogen peroxide to the bottom of the canister to keep it out of the bathroom.



**FUNKY FRIDGE FUMES**  
An open box of baking soda should do the trick for routine smell maintenance. But if you're getting funky fridge odors, you've got to do a little more. Add a cup of baking soda to a cup of water, mix well, and add a few drops of essential oil. For really bad smells, burn off the water supply and down the drain, then add the baking soda to the canister.



**BAD POTTY BOOZEY**  
For that stinky ring around the toilet, make an all-purpose scrub that's a mix of baking soda, 1 cup of water, and 1 cup of vinegar. If you're getting funky potty odors, you've got to do a little more. Add a cup of baking soda to a cup of water, mix well, and add a few drops of essential oil. For really bad smells, burn off the water supply and down the drain, then add the baking soda to the canister.



**MUSTY BASEMENT**  
If your basement smells like a musty, it's probably damp. So run a dehumidifier. Mix a few drops of the essential oil in a bucket of water, and add it to the dehumidifier. For really bad smells, burn off the water supply and down the drain, then add the baking soda to the canister.

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## Cottage-style bath for \$336

Board-and-batten wainscoting and a vanity refresher give a builder-grade bath a fresh new look



**BEFORE** He-burn fixtures and fixtures made the bathroom feel drab.

**AFTER** White wainscoting adds charm to deep gray walls. A round circular mirror adds polished, vintage white accents and has extra counter space thanks to a streamlined style vessel sink.

**BEFORE** The old vanity was a builder-grade vanity.

### THE PROJECT TALLY

Tacked up batts and furring strips, board-and-batten style using a nail gun, Skelbonds, sandpaper and caulked; then sealed it all with primer primer and paint \$25

Painted the walls a dark gray, custom mixed at the store from paint they had on hand \$60

Finished the vanity with leftover paint and wall paint \$20

Updated the vanity with a new outdoor black counter, vessel sink and faucet from a big box store \$170

Installed new overhead and vanity lights \$30

Finished the room with a new toilet and a brand-new shower curtain and ring, off-white and fabric paint \$60

**TOTAL \$336**

**NOTHING'S MORE** boring than basic beige. While the master bath at Meredith and Stephen Head's ranch house, in Fayetteville, Arkansas, was perfectly functional, it was a blank blank box of wood-on-walls. To give it some oomph, Stephen created a high-contrast look on the walls with white-painted board-and-batten wainscoting made from low-cost batts and furring strips, above it, Meredith used a dark gray paint to add depth. The vanity was in great shape, so Stephen just applied the cultured-marble top with cement and sealed butcher block and, to create more deck space, put in a vessel sink. Meredith updated the cabinet doors with white paint and some metal pulls left over from their kitchen remodel. To lighten the space, Stephen replaced the old strip vanity light with a three-shade fixture and the standard overhead flush-mount with a drum-shade pendant. Finally, Meredith added a fancy shower curtain she made herself. Having banished the bland, she says, "It's so much more welcoming now—we feel like we really gave the room some personality." —MELISSA BAKER



## Pick the right mulch

What's the secret to preventing weeds from sprouting? A 3-inch-deep topdressing applied every two years will do the trick. By selecting materials that suit your plant-and-site conditions, you'll get more bang for the buck on a healthy roof and less trouble. Use this guide to compare the options. —ANNE L. STOUTON



STRAW

Straw absorbs moisture from the exposed material, making it a poor choice for water plants and a poor choice for other plants. It's a poor choice for other plants. It's a poor choice for other plants.



COCOA HULLS

These shells are filled with nutrients and maintain an attractive lawn, but they decompose with age. They have a tendency to grow a fungus that can harm plants.



BARK

The strong texture makes it less prone to being washed down slopes, and its noxious keeps it from breaking down too quickly. Custom-vetted bark is a good choice around shrubs and trees because it's so permeable.



COMPOST

This black gold doesn't prevent weeds as well as ready mulches, but it's excellent for building up nutrients and improving soil. Spread it in a layer over your flower beds and vegetable patch.



WOOD CHIPS

You can't beat the price of wood chips, which many tree companies and landscapers give away for free. Chips break down slowly, making them best used around shrubs and trees. One drawback: They hang up with age.



## Fix it or leave it?

If you're thinking of selling your house, don't let the same bees sting you twice. To do so, could make buyers turn and run. Here, real estate pros reveal the repairs and upgrades you should do and the ones you can leave for the new owners.

**OUTDATED APPLIANCES** A buyer may have very specific tastes. So it's not worth splurging on appliances that you won't use yourself. But dated models can detract from an otherwise okay kitchen, so guarantee an inexpensive cosmetic boost with stainless-steel kitchen panels or appliance paint, both less than \$50 a pop.

**SCRATCHED WOOD FLOORS** Wood floors are a major draw for buyers, adding an average 4 to 6 percent to the selling price of a home, so refinishing costs (generally \$3-\$4 per square foot) aren't worth the investment. And if you've got a capital over wood floors, consider removing it if you're serious about selling.

**DRIFTY OLD WINDOWS** Replace old windows with energy-efficient ones as a huge investment, and if you won't be there to reap the benefits of lower energy bills, there's no sense in spending. Better to leave the task to the buyers.

**CRACKED FLOOR TILE** You know that little crack that appeared when you dropped your grandmother's cast-iron pan? A buyer could see it as a sign of a serious issue. Remove and replace the tile (earn \$100 at Home Depot or Lowes) for a seamless look. —MELISSA BAKER



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## Same space, more storage

New cabinets and a smart layout take this vintage space into the 21st century BY CAROL KADAN • PHOTOGRAPH BY CHAD HOLZER

CUTBACKS and drawers were what Molly Diener craved. An inviting style and reliable appliances were also missing from the kitchen of her 1913 Minneapolis four-square, but the limited number of cupboards and 1960s cast-iron cabinets was what really got under her skin. Turning to the David Platte Design Studio, she asked for a bright, functional space with a place for everything. She could do without an island, but she did want granite countertops, stainless-steel appliances, and a cozy apron sink. And did we mention more storage?

Designer Chris Christofferson fixed up an empty wall for cabinets by moving a poorly placed opening. Then he rearranged the layout, working with Molly, who served as the general contractor. It was a challenge to juggle bids, schedules, and deliveries, she says, and she went stretched to pace months, but she has no regrets. "Usually the removal of something seems all, but every time I walk in there I smile," she says. As for storage, "I even have a few drawers with absolutely nothing in them."



BEFORE Dated cabinets and appliances (no dishwasher) and an illogical layout hampered productivity. AFTER New splitters, the range and sleek, spacious cabinets and lots of counter space provide fresh style and function. First jobmaster: Designer Moore's HippoWhite Ivory



BEFORE

• before • after:  
kitchen

Excessive vent cabinets add detail and allow exterior heat to circulate. Furniture-like feet add to the period feel. Sink and faucet: Rustic Dishwasher/Mate



Homeowner: Molly Green; painter of the new opening, which was relocated and redesigned to blend with the Craftsman dining room. Rug: West Elm



Simple flat casing matches the original trim and evens the window cap in the adjacent dining room. Scaled down tile makes the room feel bigger.



SHARE YOUR REMODEL

Tell your tale in our Remodel's Done Room and C-Check for a chance to win cash prizes. All in this section go to [remodeler.com](http://remodeler.com)

A slide-out chopping board saves near the sink and over a cabinet pulled with bar for trash and recycling. Countertops: Capital Granite; Microwave: GE



pro advice CHICHELIER OFFICE KITCHEN DESIGNER

"By extending the subway-tile backsplashes down to the baseboard around the stove and refrigerator, we gave the kitchen a fully tiled feel at a minimal cost."



But glass-fronts add a shot of color and contrast with the brushed-metal pulls. Ragging the arrival of old and new. Kitchen: House of Antique Hardware



Light channeling recessed glass replaces the center panel in the floor to the back entry door. Rug: West Elm; Design: Pull: Reproduction



after

Shifting an opening 20 inches allowed for a more functional layout in the same footprint plus more storage and prep space.

before

The 110-square-foot space held a disjointed array of old cabinets and appliances.



1) Centered the opening, which allowed cabinets to go up on the adjacent wall.

2) Moved the fridge to the range's end spot and added upper cabinets.

3) Relocated the range and finished it with tiled drawers and prep space.



4) Created a cleaning zone under the window and lined the wall with storage.

5) Wrapped more cabinets and prep space around the wall to save the fridge feet stack.

6) Incorporated a shutter reducing appliance garage under a pantry cabinet.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JESSICA KAPLAN



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## Smarter and airier

Tweaking the sink and toilet locations gives a small bath a more spacious feel

BY JILL CONNORS • PHOTOGRAPH BY TAY KACHIGIAN

### THERE COMES A POINT

in every remodel when a homeowner hits that "This is getting old" feeling head-on. For Beverly Griffin, that time came when she found herself, on one too many nights, standing naked on a towel in a windowless corner of her kitchen—bathing out of a bucket.

Getting the only bath in her 1926 Spanish Mission home, in Riverside, California, was the only solution to so many flaws: a door that swung into the 5½-by-4-foot room, nearly hiding the toilet behind it; an awkwardly placed vanity, and old cracked tile. "When the shower drain kept plugging up, I figured it was time to do the whole thing right," says Beverly, who called on family—her daughter and co-husband are contractors—to help visualize the layout and oversee moving the sink and toilet, replacing the tub, and installing fresh tile. To duplicate existing trim in the house, Beverly made a template for an arch above the shower, which helps give the space a loftier feel. Months of inconvenience later, she couldn't be happier with the result and says "I love my beautiful little bath."

**BEFORE** A door that opened into a dark, bulky vanity and nearly hid the toilet made the 40-square-foot bath seem even more cramped. **AFTER** White subway tile, a new bathtub layout, a sleek pedestal sink, and a curved tub enclosure add function and charm. Tub: Kohler; Floor tile: discontinued Circa Light Series; Hampton Bay



BEFORE







## Patio with a past

Textured furnishings and antiques-inspired accents add up to a neoclassical living space

BY WILLIAM HARTSHORN PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL PATTON

**VENTURE INTO THE** great outdoors and you just may find new ways to maximize your home's living space. Consider the charmingly weathered elements on this terrace, which has all the features of a cozy indoor family room—outside the back door. “I wanted to create a room where nothing is too precious, so there’s no worry if it rains or the rooster climbs on the furniture,” says its designer, Cindy Kufner, author of *Greenwich Style* (Rizzoli). But the room retains a certain formality thanks, in part, to the limestone mantel and the mirror framed with a salvaged window pane above it. Neoclassical elements in stone and brass—a column capital, urns, obelisks, and the mirror’s gilded motif—plus a neutral color palette give the space an elegant feel. For ways to assemble a sophisticated outdoor room of your own, read on.



**candle**  
62011019  
Wrought-iron scorchmark plays up this hand-poured candle in a timber-wrapped look. Spooner, \$53 for two; [cheapsmitten.com](http://cheapsmitten.com). Candle: \$38;

### hand-wearing furnishings

The woven raffia tending at right has the shades of classic upholstered pieces, but this powder-coated metal frame isn't made from the home-center offer just as much pathos for a fraction of the price. (Unpainted and kate sets, \$950; [james.com](http://james.com))



### botanical pillow

A lumbar pillow with a green velvet makes outdoor seating more welcoming. \$40; [lampshade.com](http://lampshade.com)

### terra-cotta tile

Clay tiles in a polychrome weathered design. \$4.45 per sq ft; [thelibraryantique.com](http://thelibraryantique.com)



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### ivy-filled urn

Let ivy to grow down from the sides of a tabletop urn to bring fresh greenery into a living space. Urn: \$38; [save-on-crafts.com](http://save-on-crafts.com)



### stone capital

The curves of a pediment formed upside down makes for an unexpected detail. This concrete version has steel and lead detail. \$140; [marmarstone.com](http://marmarstone.com)



### terrace tower

A pyramid-shaped iron display offers a place for lanterns and ornaments of all sizes. \$227; [wagtail.com](http://wagtail.com)



### pendant light

A pillar lantern with a glass panel and a metal frame. \$140; [marmarstone.com](http://marmarstone.com)

### l lanterns

A trio of hanging lanterns on a stand provides ambient lighting. \$45; [james.com](http://james.com)



### weathered pots

Fill many terra-cotta pots with ferns and quick-growing plants to round out a garden. \$10; [james.com](http://james.com)



### tiny urn

For more ways to bring nature to a patio, download our instant edition. \$5; download at [www.thelibraryantique.com](http://www.thelibraryantique.com)

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## Ceramic house numbers

Decorative digits with handcrafted appeal are an easy way to personalize your entry BY MEGAN RACES • PHOTOGRAPHY ANDREW MICKEL

**BEFORE** house delivery, pretty much all anyone needed to find a letter was the address's name and city. But once mail carriers started making rounds door-to-door, in 1863, house numbers became a requirement for home parcel service. One way to make a variety of this practical necessity is with tile numbers that can add a touch of color and craftsmanship to virtually any style of house. Many include holes for hanging by a flower or other to create a plaque. For those that don't, make your own frame by cutting along backer board to size, inserting the numbers with construction adhesive, and trimming out the sides with end strips. Here, 16 of our favorite takes to boost your curb appeal with an artistic look.

### border lines

CRAFTSMAN TILES & FEATURE TILE  
Size: 3" W x 5" H  
Highlights: Ceramic stone tiles are designed with borders to give the look of a framed set.  
Cost: \$29 per tile, [craftsmantiles.com](http://craftsmantiles.com)



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online  
only



### nola style

JOHN ROY LUMI  
Size: 4" W x 6" H  
Highlights: These matte number lumis, the tiles used to spell out street names in the city of New Orleans.  
Cost: \$25 per tile, [thehappytile.com](http://thehappytile.com)

### vintage scallops

TESSA + TESSO  
Size: 4" W x 4" H  
Highlights: These hand-painted tiles "seem to drink a glass for an aged look."  
Cost: \$4.20 per tile, [thehappytile.com](http://thehappytile.com)



### craftsman rose

RAVINGTON TILES  
Size: 7" W x 8" H  
Highlights: This handmade plaque with bones and metal finish channel arts and Crafts style.  
Cost: \$70 as shown, [ravingtontiles.com](http://ravingtontiles.com)



rounded edges

**RAYMONDSTONE TILE**  
3/8" x 6" x 12" x 6"  
Highlights: A  
variety of colors offers a  
total of six different black  
numbers. Square holes  
make it easy to hang.  
Cost: \$50 as shown.  
[www.raymondstone.com](http://www.raymondstone.com)



maternal health

**ROCHEFORD**  
HANDMADE TUL  
Size: 5" W x 5" H  
Highlights: Upcycled  
terra-cotta provides an  
earthy backdrop for  
greeny white numbers  
and geometric details.  
Cost: \$30 per tile  
heavenumbertul.com



## hold blincoe

**LA FLORENTE APARTMENTS**  
Size: 3'W x 4'F  
Highlights: Hinged painted  
television apple details  
highlight curvy white  
numbers on a deep  
blue backdrop  
Cost: \$10 per piece  
laflor.com



Size: 37 1/2" W x 34" H  
Highlights: Painted  
numerals add extra  
dimension to a  
Mexican inspired  
sunflower design.  
Over \$8.25 per tile  
theroyflugs.com



graphic greens

**DISCREET**  
Size: 37W x 27H  
Highlights: Field tiles decorated  
with overlapping designs give  
number tiles a finished look  
Cost: \$80 to shown  
discreetltd.com



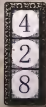
mosaic-tile design

**Highlights:** This planter can be used around any house, from 22 different tile colors for the border. Cost: \$425 as shown. [diyworks.net](http://diyworks.net)



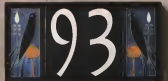
delicate touch

**DUTCH GIFT OUTLET**  
Size: 37" W x 21" H  
Highlights: Delicate style  
location and circular frame  
numbers, all in like  
intricate metalwork  
Cost: \$4 per tile, \$5.25  
for the frame  
[dutchgiftoutlet.com](http://dutchgiftoutlet.com)



## flora and fauna

5014 W. TULSAPARK  
 STE. 400 • ST.  
 HIGHLIGHT. Hand  
 pressed and glassed  
 designs can be arranged  
 in a distressed black frame.  
 Call: \$35 to \$45 per tile  
 \$20 for the frame  
 product.com



squared away

Model: 20070700  
Size: 46 1/2" x 46 1/2"  
Hydramat: These  
hand pressed tiles  
feature a Craftsman  
style motif and a  
matte glaze.  
Cost: \$20 per tile,  
www.crafters.org



### Twining vines

**DUCIELLA TALK**  
Size: 3 W x 2 W  
highlights: Hand-picked  
the materials of the design  
creates a unique  
natural look that  
gives the tiles a hand-crafted  
look. \$13.95/sq. yd.  
daniel@duciella.com



graphic statement

10-4000-HOUR U.S. CYCLE  
Size: 24" W x 24" H  
RightSide. These represent  
numbers from the 1970s have  
an original label.  
Cost: \$10 per tile, \$120 for the  
framer. [www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com)



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## Wake up an old dresser

A two-tone treatment adds dimension and interest to a vintage furniture piece

BY DEBORAH LEWIS • PHOTOGRAPHY WENDY WELLS

WHEN CONFRONTED by a small like this formerly decked dresser, A.A. El-Kammas is smitten by a desire to save and improve it. A furniture maker and shop co-owner in Hoboken, New Jersey, he says, "I want to protect the piece's history but make it younger and fresher." Here, he gave it a vigorous sanding, made and out to his my midsize, shaker, or state. Then came a lustrous oil rubdown for the oak drawers, top, and backplate trim. Two coats of latex semigloss—minus primer, to get an uneven, distressed look—reimagined the rest. "When a client brings me a piece, I will help come up with a color for the room," he says, noting the way the gray-tinted blue base plays off the masculine brown of the walls. Kammas, as he is known to all, favors low-VOC paints for the bedroom and, above all, a "don't see it, use it" approach to vintage furniture. "It's better than what they make now," he says. "And you love the wood, so you appreciate it even more." ■

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## From tiny sprouts...

...a glorious garden grows. Here's how to cultivate your own—from seed

BY ANNE SEBASTIAN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW DENSON

ONE OF THE most hopeful—and wondrous—things any of us can do is to grow our own garden from seed. Whether we're nurturing "Montage Labor" tomatoes, Patrick Wang's gold, or garlic chives "from scratch," the process brings us closer to nature—and teaches us a thing or two about patience, commitment, and luck.

Cuddling tender seedlings is the most fun part of seed starting, but well worth the effort, considering the benefits of home-grown plants. The one savings alone is a major perk: At big-box stores, tomato starts command up to \$3 per plant—the same price as a packet of quality seed. Plus, "there are hundreds of hybrids and heirlooms available to seeds that you'll never find at garden centers," says Niki Jabbar, an author and radio host based in Nova Scotia, Canada, who grows enough produce in her backyard to keep her family stocked year-round. As a gardener who's learned many lessons the hard way, Jabbar advises to "always plant fresh seed at the right time."

Germination rates decline as seeds age, and starting seeds indoors too early yields weak, wily plants.

To figure out when to sow, use your region's average last frost date as your planting (or transplanting) target and, if you're starting seeds indoors, consult the seed packet for the number of weeks it will take the seedlings to mature. Germination time varies by crop, so don't plan on sowing your entire vegetable garden on the same day. Then give the seedlings a solid start with the following step-by-step guide.



With each packet of seeds, owners of plants, seeds are the most convenient way to fill a garden bed.



## 1. Decide whether to start inside or outside

Although herb-sowing tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants need a head start indoors, you can sow most herbs seed-start directly into the garden once night-time temperatures rise above 50 degrees F. Check the seed packet for details on spacing and planting depth, and sow sparingly in rows to make thinning less of a chore. A hand digger (demon) or hand weeder can make tiny seeds easier to handle.

## 2. Prep indoor pots

If you're starting seeds indoors, avoid exposing seedlings to phytophthora, a devastating soil-borne disease, by using water and soil from a sterile source. Seeds will germinate in any container with drainage. Transplant pots to plastic soil peat or even peat-free cups with holes punched in the bottom. You might also try soil blocks, a peat-free sphagnum peat moss and perlite mixture that's sold in 4-inch cubes. To use, simply separate the cubes and plant directly into them. Hand Pick Seed Boxes: \$30. [johnnyseeds.com](http://johnnyseeds.com)

## 3. Sow with care

Moisten your starter mix or garden bed before you sow. Take the time to place each seed individually, spacing deep and far apart at the seed packet recommendation. In a starter cup, mix or bed, seeds sown in rows will compete and struggle to germinate. For heavy, tiny seeds, like radish and carrots, simply sprinkle them over damp soil or mix. Then thin with a sharp pencil.

## 4. Mimic a greenhouse

Once your seeds are sown, keep them warm and moist. In rows, water from below whenever the soil feels dry and keep them covered with plastic wrap to boost humidity. For seeds planted outdoors, place a lightweight row cover over the sown plot to create a similar greenhouse effect. In both cases, the second you notice sprouts, remove all covers. Stake all seed trays and beds to prevent fungal diseases.

## 5. Ensure adequate light

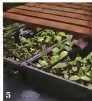
For optimal growth, seedlings need 16 hours of bright light each day—a full-spectrum indoor light. Indoors, a sunny window works in a pinch, but consider



**TIP** To encourage seeds to sprout a little sooner, soak them in warm water for a few hours right before sowing.



**TIP** Keep an oscillating fan running as the seedlings grow. The moving air helps prevent fungal disease and readies the stems for windy outdoor weather.



Seedlings in a grow light from start seeds every year. Johnson says. Place the light 2 inches above the seedlings, raising it as they grow. Providing at least 16 hours of light, regular watering, and weekly feedings of diluted fish emulsion are the keys to growing healthy transplants.

## 6. Limit the competition

Once seedlings grow a couple of leaves, it's time to thin out the seedlings for aches the crowded spacing. Dig rather than pull: the mechanical sprays to avoid causing root damage to the ones you want to keep. In rows, leave just one plant per starter cup.

## 7. Prepare to plant

Before seedlings get really prepared on a windowsill, so you can introduce them to the outdoors slowly. Once plants have three to four sets of leaves, it's time to transplant. Choose a mild day, and shade on a midday day. Gradually expose the seedlings to more and more sunlight by leaving them outside at night. Within a week, they'll be ready to transplant. If you can wait for a few days, even drizzle, day to plant in the ground. Gently ease the seedlings from their pots, shake soil and all, and settle them into their new home. Plant, water, and watch them grow. Gently, like the ground.

## 8. Protect tender plants with a row cover

Once the seedlings are planted, a lightweight row cover is your best defense against the elements. Stake it to the ground, use heavy stakes to hold them down like tent stakes, and guard against rodents, such as voles, which can eat and damage seedlings. Just this little extra protection can make the difference between a disappointing crop and a bountiful summer harvest.





## More than a Renovation— a Renaissance

Tune in as we transform an 1872 Italianate in 38 brand-new episodes, airing now!

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## Front-porch pizzazz

The This Old House TV team creates a railing of flatsawn balusters that packs a big visual punch. BY JENI GARTZ • PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANTHONY TIGLI

"THIS PORCH always looked like it was missing something," Malcolm Faulds says of the 1872 Italianate in Arlington, Massachusetts, where he and his wife, Heather, live. That something was a railing. And the question of whether to install one during the renovation for the current TOW TV season is a story all its own.

The low-slung porch doesn't require a railing to meet code, and the Faulds certainly had plenty of other details to tend to, what with the piano-molding restoration, kitchen expansion, and master-suite bumpout. Three decisions came down to aesthetics. "It looked bare and unfinished—not the kind of place where you could kick back and read the paper," says Malcolm. "I always wanted that in a front porch."

So the couple asked project architect David Whitney for railing ideas, and they ended up choosing custom flatsawn balusters, an appropriate finishing detail for the house. TOW TV's master carpenter Norm Ahrens and general contractor Tom Sides brought the design to life. "The new railing was an opportunity to make the front really pop," says Norm.



BEFORE

ABOVE: Here on "T," we call the custom-designed railing for the TOW TV project Italianate in Arlington, Massachusetts. LEFT: The bare porch looked unfinished.

## Balusters in the making

From neighborhood snapshots to custom fabrication

### 1. Inspiration

Project architect David Whitney's range of inspiration included traditional turned balusters (below) and simple flatsawn designs (right).



**Turned shapes** The color and height of balusters are picked to complement the house and the new porch.

### 2. Design

The owner of the lot design Whitney presented in the "A" lot, and all of the typical balusters below, with the key shapes of the house.



**Create silhouette** After the balusters are arranged in a row, they'll be arranged in a row that's the same height as the house. The balusters are arranged in a row that's the same height as the house.

### 3. Construction

Tim and Norm used a template to cut out each baluster with a router. They painstakingly sand each one before painting and staining. Then it was a matter of assembling the balusters and rails in place on the porch.



### Hallmarks inspired design

The railing looks like a natural fit now that it's finished, but the designing and building took some doing. With the Facades' blessing, Whitney scored around Arlington for inspiration. It's a town packed with Victorian-era houses, so he had no shortage of architectural precedents to consider. Whitney walked through neighborhoods, camera in hand, snapping photos of historically appropriate railings. "One time the police stopped me because they thought I was cutting the neighborhood for a robbery," he says.

Whitney also conducted more conventional research, but that didn't produce any clear winner either. There isn't any one definitive design for historic railing balusters, according to Michael Hall, associate professor of architectural history at Boston University. "Mixing design lessons from historical styles was common practice in the 19th century," she says. The project house reflects that.

Indeed, the Facades' house is a textbook example of historic style in terms of proportions, with its tall rectangular facade, low-angled roof, and prominent eaves. But the cornice is quite a bit more modern than one found on a "typical" historic house, which effectively said I could be devoid of ornate carriage scrollwork. It's a prime example of how people used to pick and choose from architectural stylebooks in designing their homes.

While the Facades' house has been designated as a historically significant building by the City of Arlington, Whitney's plan reflected no more than 25 percent of the facade and sides, so he didn't have to put three through a formal historic review. And, of course, the porch had no asking to begin with. All of that meant he really did have a blank slate when he set down to come up with design.

"We wanted something appropriate for the historical period, but not necessarily a slavish approach to balustrade style," Whitney says. He felt that typical heavily turned or square balusters could overwhelm the small porch.

With his neighborhood inspiration in hand and no impediments from the city, Whitney developed four designs for the rail: simple, square balusters, square, turned balusters, Classic Chippendale-style balustrading, and flatsawn balusters of his own creation. When he presented the options to the Facades, they had quite a decision to make; the railing is a relatively small feature on the house, but its location gives it real prominence.

It was the variety of shapes and the lightness of the flatsawn design that won them over to the end. "When we saw these designs in a row, we felt like it added to the elegance of the front of the house," Malcolm says. "It really connects the porch to the rest of the structure."

Whitney's winner of a design is a mash-up of his two favorite inspiration ideas (really), a typical heavily turned balustrade baluster and a conventional flatsawn one. "Imagine you took a three-dimensional round or square baluster and then cut a slice out of the center of it," he says. "You'll have a flat baluster. Like that the balusters make a reference to the traditional balustrade baluster without being a reproduction."

From a historical perspective, Whitney says, the flatsawn baluster design fits in fine with the historic style. "The porch design would have been sensitive to Victorian because it is more ornate," he says.

### Norm and Tom get to work

Once the design was settled, Norm and Tom began by transferring Whitney's scale drawing to a full-size drawing on wood. They cut first out to make one model baluster, which they then used to make a template out of plywood with a router. "The hard part is making the template," says Norm. "It has to be just right because you're going to use it to make all the other balusters."

After cutting out each one with a router and a little saw, they sanded and primed every surface. "One of the most important things to exterior work like this is to prime bare wood, and especially the end grain," says Norm. "If you don't seal the end grain, that's where water gets in and rot

starts." They used preprimed exterior-grade pine lumber to make the balusters, rather than naturally rot-resistant cedar, to keep costs in check.

Once they installed the rail, the transformation was dramatic. The formerly dull entry and porch had a more inviting look.

"We're really happy with how it came out," Malcolm says. "The railing catches your eye and makes the porch so much more appealing. Now our house looks more welcoming." ■



The finish paint colors: Benjamin Moore's Dover Blue and Lichen Chiffon. Line the new railing to the new front door and its surround.

**Where to find flatsawn balusters** You can create your own balusters from flat stock, like Norm and Tom did, or pick one of these ready-made options



**Material choice** Versaply Woodworks makes five standard flatsawn baluster profiles in either wood or rot-resistant PVC. Prices start at \$16 per baluster. [versaplywoodworks.com](http://versaplywoodworks.com)



**Custom shapes** If you want to design your own balusters but don't want to make them, Versaply Woodworks will produce them for you. Prices start at \$24 per baluster. [versaplywoodshop.com](http://versaplywoodshop.com)



**Full rail system** Toplinehome Woodworks offers railings that go with their six standard baluster profiles. Starting only the balusters, you'll find \$40 per foot. [toplinehome.com](http://toplinehome.com)

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## Building character

A standing-seam metal roof and a portico give a farmhouse a more finished look. BY ANN E. STRATTON • ILLUSTRATION BY DRIVINGHOME



BEFORE

"THE OUTSIDE just looks plain," says Mike Hamilton of her Dutch Colonial, in Sevens Road, West Virginia. He and his wife, Sheron, have seen more-charming renditions of their 1930s Sears kit home, and they'd like to bring their own facade up to snuff. So we recruited architect Jane Frederick, of Beaufort, South Carolina, to give the couple some design help.

"The house has nice lines," says Frederick, but she agrees it looks stark. To scale down the entry gable, her design includes a portico with tapered columns and brick veneer on the concrete steps. Connecting these elements onto the porch connects the two spaces, while two pairs of single-light French doors make the porch more inviting. Reframing the shed dormers to fit more windows lightens up the second story, as does swapping out the shingles for metal roofing, a nod to the home's rural setting. Much to consider! "Wow! The columns and roof really set it off—I'd love to do both," she



Adding a third window to this dormer balances the ratio of roof to glass.

## finishing touches

An all-white facade gets a boost from bits of color and timeless accents.



### brick veneer

Layer of thin multicolor bricks veneer up a base concrete arch ped. Old World Brick System \$5.49 per square foot



### sconce

Expert lines, sandblasted glass, and oval rubbed bronze finish give this fixture an old-world glow. Price: \$143



### bench

Tumbled-wood paint makes this American-made outdoor yellow pine bench an instant focal point. DutchCrafters \$239



### columns

Simple, elegant posts composed of an easy-care fiberglass-reinforced polymer are stronger than steel. Turners \$850

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## Make a concrete planter

Grab some concrete-countertop mix and build plywood forms to create striking landscape ornaments. BY JOHN CARMY • PHOTOGRAPHY BY KYLE SMITH

**C**AN'T FIND a planter quite the size—or price—you like? We'll show you how to make one just in time for spring. These planters are constructed of crack-resistant concrete-countertop mix. The formwork quickly cures to a smooth finish and can be customized with translucent stains in a variety of colors. Don't be put off by having to work with a new material: Building the plywood forms and pouring the concrete isn't all that difficult. The result is a versatile vessel that works for flowers and large plantings alike.

Follow along as *This Old House* contributor Christopher Biedel, owner of *Penn*, a handmade-furniture company in Brooklyn, New York, leads you through the simple step-by-step of making a new springtime accessory for your porch or yard.

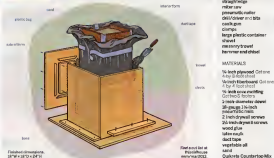
**Materials:** Quikrete Countertop Mix (\$25 for an 80-pound bag); Stain: Quikrete Translucent Concrete Stain; \$20 per gallon; quikrete.com



**COST:** \$50+ each  
**TIME:** Two days  
**DIFFICULTY:** Moderate  
Working with concrete requires following a recipe

DAY-TO-DAY  
TIMELINE

**SATURDAY** Build the forms and fill with mix (Steps 1–6)  
**SUNDAY** Open the forms (Step 7)



TOOLS

circle saw  
rafter square  
straightedge  
ruler saw  
pneumatic nailer  
drill/driver and bits  
concrete mix  
concrete  
large plastic container  
sheet  
concrete/mortar  
hammer and chisel

MATERIALS

1/2-inch plywood Get one  
4 by 8 foot sheet  
1/2-inch kiln-dried Get one  
4 by 8 foot sheet  
1/2-inch concrete  
concrete  
3-inch diameter dowel  
3/8-inch 1/2-inch  
screws  
2-inch drywall screws  
24 inch-diameter 8 screws  
wood glue  
latex rough  
duct tape  
vegetable oil  
sand  
Quikrete Countertop Mix



1 MAKE THE FORM PARTS

**A) Slice the form panels.** Place the plywood sheet on your work surface. Prepped up with a square to allow clearance for the circular saw blade. Following the cut list, measure and mark the dimensions for the sides, inset panels, base, and cleats of the concrete form. Use a circular saw and a rafter square, as shown, to make the cuts.  
**B) Cut the molding.** To frame the four inset panels, you'll need 16 pieces of molding in two lengths. One miter saw, rough-cut the pieces 1/2-inch too long. Adjust the blade to 45 degrees and make the right-hand miter cut, as shown, for the pieces. Mark the pieces for the left-hand cut, adjust the blade to the opposite 45-degree angle, and cut the miter length.

2 MAKE THE SIDES OF THE FORM

**A) Attach the inset panels.** Mark the location of the inset panels on the four sides of the form. Apply wood glue to the panels and set them in place. Use a pneumatic nailer with 18-gauge 7/8-inch nails to secure the panels.  
**B) Attach the molding.** Apply glue around the edges of the inset panels. Place the molding one piece at a time, nailing each one as you make your way around the panel.



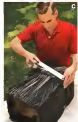
**TIP** Although you can vary the planter's size according to your needs, the finished walls should be at least 1 1/2 inches thick for adequate strength.

3 ASSEMBLE THE FORM

**A) Join the form edges.** Set the base of the form on your work surface. Stand two of the sides upright to create one corner of the form, with the wider piece overlapping the narrower one. Slide a 1/4-inch bit and a drill/driver to make three pilot holes through the face of the overlapping board and into the edge of the other one. Secure the joint with 2-inch drywall screws. Repeat the process for three more corners to form a box.  
**B) Install the cleats.** Cut all 16 pieces of 1/2-inch diameter wood dowel 14 inches long in your miter saw. Drill a hole through the planter. Using a 1/4-inch bit, drill a pilot hole through the dowel. Screw it to the center point of the base with a 2-inch screw, as shown.  
**C) Attach the cleats.** With the form centered on the base, place the cleats around it. Secure the cleats to the base with 1 1/2-inch screws. Use latex rough to plug all the corners and joints inside the form to keep the concrete from escaping.



SEE HOW IT'S DONE  
To watch videos of this project, go to [diyweekendremodel.com](http://diyweekendremodel.com)/mar2014



## 5 PREP THE MIX AND FORM

**A) Add water to mix.** Pour a half bag of counter-top mix into a large plastic container. Add a half gallon of water and combine the mix with a shovel until it's thoroughly combined and has the consistency of soaked oatmeal. Set the mix aside for 10 minutes to allow it to slake. This resting period helps the water interact chemically with the cement.

**B) Lubricate the forms.** Apply oil to the inside of the forms to make it easier to remove the planter from the forms (Step 7B). Vegetable or mineral oil will work, and a spray-on applicator makes the task easier.

## 4 MAKE THE INTERIOR FORM

**A) Cut the pieces.** An interior form made from fiberboard sits inside the plywood forms on the walls of the planter. Draw the four sides and the base (a sheet of fiberboard). Use your circular saw and a clamped straightedge to cut the pieces.

**B) Assemble the form.** Create a box, as shown using duct tape at the corners behind the pieces together. Tape the joints on the outside. Then tape them on the inside.

**C) Cover the form.** To protect the fiberboard from the water in the counter-top mix, cover the interior form in a plastic bag and tape it securely in place.

## 6 FILL THE FORM

**A) Add the bottom layer.** Use a masonry trowel to load mix into the form, bringing the layer up to the top of the form dished. Work the mix into the corners, making sure to fill them completely.

**B) Install the interior form.** Set the interior form inside the plywood form. Fill the form with sand, as shown, to prevent its walls from collapsing or bowing from the pressure of the surrounding mix. Be sure to center the interior form to get an even wall thickness on all sides.

**C) Fill the sides.** Pour the rest of the dry mix into your container and prepare it as you did in Step 5A. Let the new mix slake for 10 minutes, then trowel it into the space between the forms. Bring it to the top and slide. Use the trowel to level the top edges of the walls smooth. Tap the sides of the filled form with a hammer to help remove any air bubbles from the mix. Let the mix cure in the form at least 18 hours.

**TIP** Rinse the completed planter with warm water and dish soap to remove residual vegetable oil.



## 7 BREAK DOWN THE FORMS

**A) Remove the interior form.** Tip the form on its side to pour out the sand. Stand the form back upright and remove the fiberboard walls of the interior form.

**B) Pull the form apart.** Remove the screws from the form and the dowel. Gently peel away the sides, as shown, and lift the planter on its side. Use your shovel or lever and a 14-inch bar to loosen the dish dowel, and a hammer and chisel to pry it out.

We finished our planter with a water-based translucent concrete stain from Quikrete. Get a friend to help you lift the planter to its feet, and plant something pretty. ■





**FRESH FACADE**  
 DISPOSABLE: The new  
 gave the house a more  
 gracious look, with  
 wood windows, siding  
 and roof shingles.

**BOGT 12 EVEN**  
 This panel: The  
 state-of-the-art  
 is back inside a  
 stepped-back  
 addition that opens  
 to a great view.



# ROOM- BY-ROOM REVIVAL

TWO ATTENTIVE HOMEOWNERS TURN THEIR HAS-BEEN HOUSE  
 INTO A GRACIOUS HOME BY GETTING EVERY DETAIL JUST RIGHT

By Deborah Siskind • Photographs by Laura Moss • Produced by Colette Scanlon • Styling by Mariellen Miller



It's not just date nights with a chorus of "Let's wrap past." But she's pretty much how things went when Christine Williams told her husband-to-be she'd always wanted to fix up an old house. "Me too," he said, adding, "I've been watching *This Old House* since I was 10." Two hours and 16 years later, the two still can't keep their hands off paint chips and lighting catalogs.

Asked what made them match up their current home, in New Jersey, right out of the hands of another buyer, Christine says fondly, "The place was a dream."

A 1960s Neoclassical with square windows and wainscoting, the house sported a shallow-pitched roof and a cantilevered second floor—picture a facade with a beetle brow and an overhanging flat aluminum siding.

Christine, a fan of old-school Colonialism, couldn't wait to flatten the front, sharpen the roof's pitch, and finish the rooms with Oriental carpets and traditional trim. Her husband, whose DIY skills are so developed that "he could be a builder," the wife, was primed to hire a construction crew and his choice of materials. As seasoned homeowners, both had a realistic idea of what was involved in updating the house and a willingness to invest in equally seasoned pros.

The goal: to make a washed-up 40-something look like a dignified centerpiece, in a land of reverse face-lift. The vision: a starchy Colonial Revival in Manchester, Vermont, the couple had moved in on during an open-ended search for their dream house, not only sipping its picture but knocking on its door. (They wanted to know if they could measure the width of its clapboards.)

They had already lived up their ambition, Jeff DeGraw, after admiring work on a neighbor's house and tuckering down the street. Turned out he had also helped design a house on Warwick, New York, to please to Christine



**WALL-TO-WALL**  
RIGHT: Grass molding, wainscoting, and a collection of salvaged windows give the dining room a new-old look.

that she was using its photo as her screen saver.

When DeGraw took a look at the five-bedroom, three-and-a-half-bath object of the couple's adoration, he shook his head at the small windows, dark rooms, and "ugh-ly" attached garage. "But the bones were good," he says. "The house also had a good relationship to the street. And it was on a perfectly dirt lot with great afternoon light at back."

The house would need overhauling outside and in, with a fresh layout to suit two busy people with a young daughter, an energetic dog, and a desire for equal parts warm family gathering space, private getaway, and polished public space for his entertaining. In other words, the owners wanted a gorgeous foyer, but just as important were a bill-paying sanctuary and a cozy breakfast nook with shoulder room for a Great Dane.

About the existing 8-foot ceilings, DeGraw was sanguine. "There's such a belief that taller and bigger is better," he says of trends in some suburbs. But by keeping the ceilings where they were and using new beams and woodwork correctly, he was able to replace the

**WARMED UP**  
LEFT: Very colorful, framed beadboard backslashes. Quartz trivets and flooring and a table-styled island give the space kitchen an inviting pulled-together.

**SHOP THE STYLE**  
To find furnishings similar to those used in this house, keep shopping or go to [www.kimblehouse.com](http://www.kimblehouse.com)



**SMOOTH FLOW**  
ABOVE: The hall's pantry provides storage space for dishes and glassware and a staging area for formal events in the dining room.



## floor plan

A well-composed portico with raised-lined barrel-vault ceiling now graces the 1960s house. The rear additions, first- and second-floor layouts, and garage are also new.



proportion of older homes. He adds, "In many people are building big, crony palaces, and along comes this absolutely simple, quiet house."

But don't get the idea that it started out with perfect proportions or that the trio, soon to be joined by a general contractor, lacked for big ideas. Along with reconfiguring the facade and tuckering out the porches, they aimed to replace the McGurns' sleep-in a mudroom, and add an at-back, with two wing building a library-office, the enter a new kitchen and family room. Two new fireplaces and a screened porch would also appear down stairs. Upstairs, the redo would eliminate one bedroom and create a 600-square-foot master suite edging into the space over the new garage.

After the family moved into the home of relatives nearby, GCs Bill Sengemiller and Tom Kubacki stripped the house down to its framing and hardwood floors and removed nearly half of the interior walls. Then they enlarged the footprint and began assembling the pieces. DeGraw concentrated cozy spots at the back and most formal rooms toward the front, where he replaced the straight-up stairs with a set that goes up two steps to a landing, then turns, making a longer, gentler climb.



## MODERN FAMILY SPACES

**LEFT:** A red-headed parrot warms up the family room. **ABOVE:** The reconfiguring adds room. It's now a bedroom and under the new roofline.



#### LIGHT FILLED

**LEFT:** A window blindish pulls the eye upward in the master bath, the only room in the house with a 9-foot ceiling. **ABOVE:** Wallpaper sweeps the room, which also holds a shower and twin vanities with bracketed marble shelves.

A period vibe flows, as DeGross's woods, from "the apex tool of the party." From the outside, the strokes in all-wood windows with narrow muntins and traditional trim, roof shingles and siding made of oaks, copper gutters, and a steep-back in the far end of the 24-foot-long garage that makes it look 4 feet closer. Inside, solid doors, hefty trim, and deep window wells—a by-product of making the first floor flush with the second—partner with the 9-foot ceilings to evoke an earlier time.

An even bigger trick was getting all this done in 10 months. "I beg about it," says Sugarbaker.

He and DeGross both credit the homeowners for staying on top of the job and knowing exactly what they wanted, and when and where. Christine pinned up the blueprint of the Manchester house where all could see it and produced magazine clips and notes from house tours to help guide decisions about design and construction. "Call me a copcat," she declares cheerfully.

She also calls herself a Type A, who did not waste time second-guessing choices in appliances, backplash materials, and the like. "If the tile was needed by the 7th," Christine says, "it was there by the 11th."

Work moved forward so smoothly, in fact, that the team realized they could make an unscheduled stop in the attic—which they turned into a gorgeous crafts room—and still be done two months short of a year.

A vintage-style worktable found its way into the crafts room, where it extends an invitation to the daughter to work with clay and her parents to fiddle with floor plans. "We like projects!" Christine says. Indeed, next up is one part of the new-old house you haven't yet heard much about. Says Christine, who is already reliving the task, "We're about to do the basement." ■



**SCREENED PORCH**  
**ABOVE:** Layers of trim and transom windows give this outdoor room its indoor ambience.



#### MASTER SUITE

**RIGHT:** The bedroom opens to a sitting area, which appears to cloister, echoing the warmth in nearby old houses.



# Curb Appeal

## Before & Afters

INNER BEAUTY IS IMPORTANT, but when it comes to your house, what's on the outside counts plenty. A well-designed exterior is a joy to come home to that can earn you major points with your neighbors—and attract potential buyers, down the road. This Old House readers have been hard at work fixing up their facades, and on the following pages, we share six of their impressive results with you. Whether you're looking to make a big change (putting on a new front porch) or a small one that yields a big impact (hint: harness the power of paint), you'll find inspiration here, along with tips for making it happen without straining your budget.

by Sarah Stebbins



### Draw out distinctive details with paint

A drab color scheme camouflaged the architectural elements that defined Steve and Joana Paul's Gothic Revival, in Wichita, Kansas. With renewed woodwork and a five-color palette, the formerly faded 1886 house reclaims its proud (and) Lady heritage.

**PAINT** • Steve and Joana tested 38 paint swatches on the house before making their final picks. Sherwin-Williams's Garden Sage for the blue color, accented with darker green Meadow Trail, cinnamon Timberlake, and golden White Magis. They did the front door and some smaller details in Cinnamon Door.

**PORCH** • They salvaged all but one of the old columns and posts but replaced what Joana dubbed the "Arched Hitchcock silhouette" balustrade on the balcony and the diamond-patterned skirting, which likely weren't original to the house, with more traditional woodwork motifs, and female neoclassical Spanish cedar.

**TRIM** • Except for a few rotted sections that were too far gone, most of the woodwork merely had to be scraped and caulked prior to painting. About 40 percent of the home's water-damaged soffits were swapped out for new panels made of tongue and groove Douglas fir.

**LANDSCAPING** • The couple cleaned up the overgrown gardens and supplemented what was there with shrubs and perennials that can handle the prairie climate, including Cistus plants, dwarf Japanese barberry, liriope, and heat-tolerant peonies.



A pergola adds visual interest to the facade without blocking light.



BEFORE

## Customize a classic style

Jeff Anselmi could see that, underneath its plain Jane front, his 1927 English-style cottage in Birmingham, Michigan, had strong character. A car designer with a strong aesthetic sensibility, he wanted to create a facade with more visual interest. Working with his dad, Rick, who acted as general contractor, Jeff remade every inch of the exterior.

**SIDING AND TRIM** • The new facade, designed by Rick, features pretreated western red cedar shingles, composite shutters, and layers of composite trim painted in Sherwin-Williams' Spaulding Gray. All the rest is its real red.

**WINDOWS AND DOOR** • Single-pane windows were swapped for more efficient double-hung units with wood exteriors and factory-painted aluminum interiors. Jeff kept the front gable's original arched entry, also a mark of the English cottage style, but refreshed the door with a medium-brown stain.

**STONEWORK** • A masonry team replaced the concrete front walkway and brick steps with Belgard block-paved pavers and carried the material through to the floor of the new garage, which replaced one that was in disrepair.

**LANDSCAPING** • Silver maple trees shade the yard for much of the morning, so Jeff filled the bed in front of the porch with shrubs that demand only partial sun: boxwoods, red barberries, and a dwarf knollcypripent. A row of arborescences lines the driveway, providing color, a windbreak, and privacy.



**NICE CURB APPEAL**  
Build your exterior makeover a strong foundation: invest in America's best landscape contractor. (See this page and go to [thishousemag.com/04](http://thishousemag.com/04).)

## Create period appeal

The Craftsman character of Augie and Elyn Anderson's 1924 bungalow, in Bartlett, Illinois, was obscured by wide aluminum siding, a nondescript front porch, and misguided "updates," such as a Victorian-style entry door. With some thoughtful renovations, including a new mahogany front door, the couple brought back the period charm—and earned a plaque from the local historical society.

**PORCH** • A pair of chunky wood posts was not enough to support the roof, which bowed beneath the central dormer. With an architect and a contractor, the couple drew a new porch supported by a trio of tapered cedar columns in the Craftsman style. Augie, a former bricklayer, dug and poured the columns' footings for the columns and did the veneer work on the pier supports. He also replaced rotted floorboards with tongue-and-groove Douglas fir.

**WINDOWS** • The couple had previously replaced the house's single-pane windows with triplets; even one double hung that reference the triple-pane originals on the dormer.

**SIDING** • They liked the low-maintenance aspect of the white 11-inch-reveal aluminum siding but not the look—or the dents that appeared after a hailstorm. So they upgraded to 4 1/2-inch-reveal tan vinyl clapboards that match the color of the original wood clats, and vinyl shutters to distinguish the dormer. Red window trim complements the brickwork.

**LIGHTING** • Replaced fixtures and a number glass sconce with a geometric, Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired one now illuminate the porch, a major improvement over the single pendant that used to dangle awkwardly over the door frame.



BEFORE



French editing  
06/08 05/09 06/10  
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## Uncover hidden character

Outside, Tim and Wendy Hagen's 2526 bungalow was in a but in relatively good shape. Even so, thanks to Oregon's cool, wet weather, it took two and a half years to transform the exterior and the overgrown yard. With Tim, whose dad was a woodworker, handling the construction and Wendy on design, they turned the fair-weather bungalow into a high-wattage character.

**PAINT** • Wendy wanted the colors to pop, so she steered clear of neutrals and went with a custom-mixed Sherwin-Williams green for the siding and brown on the trim, then spiced up the entryway with a splash of Benjamin Moore's Caribbean Blue. Wider on the stoopsteps and a local citrus, similar to Behr's Orange Burst, on the entry door.

**LANDSCAPING** • The first task the Hagens tackled was mowing in the monster boxwood along the front walk to make way for an entry garden filled with colorful foliage plants and a new path that Wendy built with a pile of cobblestones discovered in the yard.

**DORMERS** • Tim framed out full-length front and back shed dormers to gain ceiling height and floor space upstairs. To preserve the facade character and sense of proportion, he kept the addition relatively small and took style cues for the windows and roofline from the original dormer.



BEFORE

## Expand the front porch

When Cheryl Smith and Skip McPherson first laid eyes on their 1825 Folk Victorian, in Roanoke, Virginia, they saw a giant void where a gracious front porch had once stood. After a year-long DIY hiatus, the bread, friendly porchies back, and Cheryl and Skip's placid place one of the most visited destinations on the block.

**PORCH** • Skip, a seasoned renovator, tore off the ill-proportioned concrete-and-wrought-iron portico and designed and built his traditional-style replacement, an 8 by 32-foot porch constructed with pressure-treated pine posts and railings, composite decking, and a plywood beadboard ceiling.

**SIDING AND ROOF** • They replaced the aluminum siding with fiber-cement, painted Benjamin Moore's November Rain. The new porch has a standing-seam steel roof to match the original house roof, which got a power-washing and a fresh coat of Essex Green.

**WINDOWS** • The couple swapped the old windows for look-alike two-over-two double-hung that are much more energy-efficient. To cut costs, Skip crafted and installed decorative board-and-batten-style shutters made from weather- and insect-proof PVC.



BEFORE



To make the house look painted, paint the foundation a shade darker than the siding.



BEFORE

## Spiff up the existing structure

The house was nearly invisible, hidden behind a wall of towering Norway spruce trees. But when Mark Andrews saw it, he knew he'd found the home he had been looking for. "The improvements the house needed were pretty simple," Mark says of the circa 1890 Folk Victorian, in South Plainfield, New Jersey. A fresh paint job and some overall streamlining—starting with the removal of two of those spruces—made for a dramatic transformation.

**LANDSCAPING** • Aside from the overhanging trees, the property had little in the way of plantings. During his first autumn at the house, Mark took advantage of end-of-season sales at his local nursery and created beds along the front and side yards filled with rhododendron azaleas, barberry, juniper, and maiden grass. He also hired pros to cover the driveway with a fresh layer of crushed stone and to replace 180 feet of deteriorated concrete walkway, making it slightly wider.

**PORCH** • To give the porch a cleaner look, Mark removed the screen panels that enclosed the left side and took out a space-eating vestibule that had been tacked on by a previous owner. Now the original glass-paneled front door, with its elegant so-called surround, stands again in the center space of the facade.

**PAINT** • Instead of stripping the asbestos siding that covered the original wood clapboards—a move that would have cost Mark a valuable layer of insulation—he decided to simply paint what was there in Benjamin Moore's Antique Pewter. To make the trim details pop, he chose the high-contrast combo of White Mountaintop and Townsends Lattice Brown.

**WINDOWS** • The windows on the first floor are well-preserved originals, but upstairs were drafty 1990s-era replacements. Mark swapped out 12 of those for fiberglass double-hung with period-appropriate two-over-two grille patterns. He went with partial replacement units so that he wouldn't have to remove moldings and risk damaging the 19th-century woodwork, the walls, and the siding. But fitting new windows into the old framework was no easy task. "None of my calls are loud, so I had to make custom trim pieces to fill in the gaps," says Mark. Each window took about 10 hours! ■

/FROM OUR FAVORITE BLOGGERS/

# 7 CREATIVE LOW-COST UPGRADES

In the fertile imaginations of home-design bloggers, every cramped kitchen, dull wall, and beat-up countertop turns into an opportunity for reinvention—and an inspiring read. With trademark ingenuity and everyday tools, they find ways to combine sweat equity with a handful of affordable materials to solve the sorts of dilemmas that less creative homeowners can only gripe about. Follow their optimistic examples and you'll soon be enjoying enhanced spaces in your own house, with money left over for, yep, your next project.

BY JILL CONNORS



/PROJECT 1/

## BEADBOARD KITCHEN BANQUETTE



**MASTERMINDS:** Sadie and Reagan Lewis tackle renovation projects in their 1960s ranch, in San Antonio, and share them in *sadielewis.com*

**INSPIRATION:** "This was a funny little corner next to the kitchen, and since we didn't have any seating in the kitchen itself, we knew this would be ideal for entertaining—and for the baby," says Sadie, who was 6 months pregnant with their daughter, Paige, when they completed the project.

**HOW THEY DID IT:** They bought dining lumber, stained chairs for a few bucks, and built the banquettes 14 inches deep and 20 inches high. They stapled perforated aluminum sheets to the front of the L-shaped bench seat's long side, which conceals an AC repurposed and left the short side open for basket storage. Prepared MDF beadboard, stained horizontally and framed in the top and sides, tops the bench's back. Reagan gets her hands in the Texas heat, he skinned it into the attic's crawl space to serve as nesting furniture, box so that the new pendant light would be cradled over the table.

**WHAT IT COST:** \$490 for the framing lumber, MDF beadboard sheets, and trim (\$200), metal shelving (\$60), seat-cushion foam (\$75), pendant light (\$30), and paint supplies (\$30). Using lemons (lemon and paint helped keep the project's costs down).



## /PROJECT 2/ GARDEN BENCH FROM AN OLD BED



**MASTERMINDS:** Marjorie Kutz, Kutz ("Mak") and Jill Wilson stylists/accompaniers for their shop, in San Clemente, California, where Jill's husband,

Simon Wilson, provides much of the carpentry magic. They designed this knee-high and style tips at makandjill.com.

**INSPIRATION:** "We like to find old pieces of furniture with great lines and give them new life," says Mak. "This spindle bed had no futon, since not many people use double beds now, so we went and turned it into a garden bench!"

**HOW THEY DID IT:** Simon merged parts from the 1930s maple bed and an old coffee table. He used the arched headboard for the bench's back and cut the spindle footboard in two to form the arms. The bed's side rails frame the seat, which he made from the coffee-table top. For maximum strength and stability, he glued and screwed every joint and added corner brackets. Mak and Jill finished the bench with a distressed paint treatment and added a final coat of polyurethane for protection.

**WHAT IT COST:** \$300 for the bed (\$150) and table (\$150). All the sandpaper, paint, and polyurethane for the finish was left over from other projects.



### SMART SOLUTION

To give the piece a distressed look, Mak and Jill applied a base coat of Annie Sloan Chalk Paint in a bright green and followed with a cheerful mix of Florence and Napoleonic Blue. Then they randomly ragged up the surface with 220-grit sandpaper and finished with a coat of polyurethane to protect the piece outdoors.

## /PROJECT 3/ INTERIOR BARN DOOR



**MASTERMINDS:** Ashli and Lee Malinck collaborate on projects for their master-style house, in Bethel, Columbia, and post them on their blog, malinckinteriors.com.

**INSPIRATION:** "This idea came out of necessity," Ashli says. "We had a swinging door between our kitchen and mudroom that would fit the table at our dining area when it swung in. I love the look of sliding barn doors and realized that was the solution."

**HOW THEY DID IT:** Lee built the door from pine 2x4s and slats, and Ashli primed and painted it. Lee welded the track and straps out of 1/4-inch steel from a metal fabricator; the wheels came from a automotive shop. Ashli found the appliance pull and unified all the metal parts by coating them with Rust-Oleum oil-rubbed-bronze spray paint.

**WHAT IT COST:** \$250 for the handle (\$20), metal track and wheels (\$30), lumber and slats (\$50), and primer and paint (\$50).



## /PROJECT 4/ CONCRETE-LOOK COUNTERTOPS

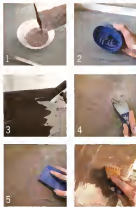


**MASTERMIND:** Jenny Karamelis, an interior designer who loves a good DIY project, applied her design skills to the two-story single-gabled house in Phoenix that she shares with her husband and three young daughters. She chronicles her projects at jennykaramelisblog.blogspot.com.

**INSPIRATION:** "I wanted to change the laundry room's old laminate countertops, and I couldn't splash a dime. I was really inspired by a run-in I saw on another design website, karapandopoulos.com, and decided to give this really inexpensive solution a try. I actually went up to date."

**HOW SHE DID IT:** Jenny cleaned and roughed up the existing laminate and applied three thin layers of Andre Feather Finish, a Portland-cement-based product typically used as a flooring underlayment. She spread on the mix in a fashion similar to frosting a cake, sanding after each layer, and finished with two coats of clear concrete sealer to repel water.

**WHAT IT COST:** \$400 for Andre Feather Finish mix (\$15) and Sikaprep Natural Look clear concrete sealer (\$25).



### /STEP-BY-STEP/

1. Jenny mixed up a batch of Andre Feather Finish in a black-grey consistency. 2. To help the product adhere, she used a wallpaper scoring tool to roughen the old surface. Glazing thoroughly with a coarse grit would work well too. 3. With a wide-bring trowel, she applied three thin layers of the mix, sanding between layers. 4. A hand-julij brush helped smooth bumps and ridges. Jenny also used the knife to score a line between the countertop and wall to suggest the corner of solid stone. 5. A final sanding reveals natural patterns. 6. Jenny brushed on two coats of clear sealer, letting each fully subside before the next layer.



/PROJECT 5/

## CLOSET TURNED READING NOOK



**MASTERMIND:** Brittany Bailey has been fixing up the 1976 Dutch Colonial she shares with her husband and two sons, in Raleigh, North Carolina, for seven years. She shares her DIY ideas on [prettyhandygirl.com](http://prettyhandygirl.com).

**INSPIRATION:** "My older son has a walk-in closet in his room that he uses as a hideaway, but my younger son's room only had two small closets, so I converted one into a reading nook for him."

**HOW SHE DID IT:** Brittany removed all the trim from the closet's entrance. For a built-in bench with open storage, she built two levels. The first frame hugs the inside perimeter of the door at floor level and has a piece of plywood nailed across, forming a storage shelf. The second frame, for the bench, hugs the closet perimeter at a height of 19 inches. Brittany anchored the frame to the wall studs, then added two center supports and topped the frame with plywood for a seat. Two 8-inch-deep display shelves are finished with crown molding. Lock-pipe facing strips suggest wall panels.

**WHAT IT COST:** \$450 for lumber and trim (\$400), hardware and hooks (\$30), paint (\$60), curtains (\$25), foam cushion (\$30) and a light (\$5).



/PROJECT 6/

## BOOKCASE KITCHEN ISLAND



**MASTERMINDS:** Courtney and Bill Altman have a normal three-bedroom, including the 1936 split level in New Jersey where they are raising three sons. They write about it at [goldieboyandme.com](http://goldieboyandme.com).

**INSPIRATION:** "We wanted to add storage and build an island," Courtney says. "IKEA shelves gave us an affordable way to do it."

**HOW THEY DID IT:** A contractor helped the couple take down the 6½-foot-wide load-bearing wall and install a laminated veneer lumber (LVL) beam overhead. Bill built the half wall and added the shelves. "To create a kitchen island with open storage," he fastened three prebuilt bookcases from IKEA to the longer side of the half wall. Then he wrapped the island's three closed sides with beadboard sheets, molding, and corbels (\$200).

**WHAT IT COST:** \$663 for three low-belly bookcases (\$103) and a butcher-block counter (\$169) from IKEA, lighting (\$109), and construction materials, including MDF beadboard sheets, molding, and corbels (\$200).



**SMART SOLUTION**

Three low bookcases supply open storage on one side of the island. On the other side, a butcher-block top over hanging wooden shelving units. Cabinets are bolted high up so the living room side of the island gives the family a place to hang in.

/PROJECT 7/

## DIAGONAL PLANK WALL



**MASTERMIND:** Mandy Gubler applies her "no-fuss DIY" philosophy to projects in her home in southern Utah and on her blog, [renovagreenvalley.com](http://renovagreenvalley.com).

**INSPIRATION:** "I wanted this small stretch of hallway near my girls' bedrooms to have texture and interest and fun at the same time, and I was ready to rethink the black and white painted stripes. I had been noticing awesome planked walls floating around the Internet, but I wanted mine to be different, so I planked diagonally instead of horizontally."

**HOW SHE DID IT:** Mandy bought two 6-inch-thick, 4-by-8-foot pieces of Masonite and had the home center rip them into 3-inch-wide planks. Once home, she measured starting from the bedroom door casing and cut the planks to length, using a miter saw to make 45-degree cuts at the ends where they meet the door trim, wall, or ceiling. She made straight cuts whenever two lengths butted end to end. Scraps of Masonite served as spacers to create a slight gap between the rows. Mandy fastened the planks right over the black and white-striped wall using a nail gun, then filled in the nail holes, primed, and painted.

**WHAT IT COST:** \$35 for two 4-by-8-foot pieces of Masonite; she used spackle, primer, and paint left over from other projects.



**/STEP-BY-STEP/**

1. Mandy measured between casings on a diagonal, then used a miter saw to cut Masonite planks to length with 45-degree angles at the ends that meet base wall or ceiling. Between planks, 1-inch Masonite scraps served as spacers. 2. She fastened the planks to the wall with a nailgun. On long runs, she made straight cuts whenever ends butted together. 3. After installation, she filled nail holes, primed, and painted.



Creating wallpaper and how-to bookshelves, home design ideas in our sister edition. Go to [thebookshelves.com/vol1](http://thebookshelves.com/vol1)

<ALL ABOUT>

# Fiberglass Entry Doors

They're weatherproof, easy to maintain, and harder than ever to distinguish from wood. Here's how to choose a fiberglass door that fits your house and your budget **BY JOHN GAMBINO**

**GO AHEAD, KNOCK.** Top-quality fiberglass entry doors have gotten so good at mimicking the look, feel, and thrust of wood that you could swing one open and close it behind you without ever realizing you weren't handling solid mahogany, oak, or pine. Because they're made from the same family of glass-fiber reinforced polymers used to craft airplanes, surfboards, and Corvettes, these super-durable doors won't warp, rot, shrink, or swell like wood doors—and they boast superior resistance to insects and fire, too. As for curb appeal, finger the plastic-looking imposters introduced a couple of decades ago. The new models feature convincingly textured fiberglass “skins,” energy-saving insulation, and a litany of finish options, as well as molding, glass, and hardware choices to match any house style. “Manufacturers have given the doors real life now,” says Tim Ellett, president of California Windows and Doors, a dealer and installer in Palm Desert. Ellett didn't even sell fiberglass entry doors 12 years ago, but now the category accounted for 90 percent of his door business. Consider the aesthetic improvements and a price tag that's often lower than what you'd pay for a comparable wood door, and today's fiberglass entry doors become legitimate rivals. Still, getting the right look and fit requires doing a little homework—or just reading on.

## ANATOMY OF A FIBERGLASS DOOR

Think of a sandwich, with glass or fiberglass skin as the bread and rigid insulating foam as the filling. An exterior flange of wood or composite rails and stiles frames the exposed edges.



solid or composite flange

exterior fiberglass skin

insulating foam core

solid or composite flange and exterior rails



## VITALS

### SLAB OR PRICHLING?

A slab is just the door, plain or a good imitation that hinges on its hinges for the hardware, and hangs at an existing jamb. A pricling door comes hinged to a jamb and has a threshold and a weatherstripping system with the option of a battery-installed lock and latch. You turn it out to suit your taste.

### WHAT'S IT COST?

You'll pay anywhere from \$450 for a smooth-surfaced, often ready-to-go to \$1,000 or more for a finishing, radiantly light-colored, factory skin or oil-waxed painted model with lights and moldings. The fanciest will be a high-quality fiberglass entry door is \$1,500 to \$2,000. And installed, \$400 to \$500 to have it installed.

### HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

A lifetime. No matter what the maker will protect the door if it fails for nothing at all in your house. Glass and factory finish, both are another story. Typically 50 to 75 years, respectively.

### WHERE TO BUY?

Order through big box retailers for the largest selection of hardware, finish and glass options. Or hire an independent local dry wall and door supplier.

Fiberglass entry doors are offered up to meet, hear, and the setting of finish, mind, and weather. Slabs, priclings, factory finish, both are another story. Typically 50 to 75 years, respectively.



Molded fiberglass panels and simulated divided lights can copy the look of wood French doors. Similar to above. Pricing, factory-finished European 1/4 Light double door: \$6 (white), \$2,500 (pella.com)

## Is a fiberglass door right for you?

It's not an open-and-shut case. But, increasingly, the advantages of fiberglass will surprise you

### PROS

• **It's stable.** Fiberglass doesn't shrink and swell like wood, so these doors won't stick in summer or let in drafts in winter. And the molded panels and window grilles won't require rescaling.

• **It's energy efficient.** Thanks to the insulating foam inside, a fiberglass door is typically about R-6, compared with R-2 for wood. Keep in mind, however, that adding windows—even ones with low-e glass—significantly lowers the advantage.

• **It's low maintenance.** The only routine upkeep needed is regular cleaning with a damp cloth. Because fiberglass doesn't expand and contract, temperature swings don't degrade the finish. A maintenance top coat of clear marine varnish (for a wood-like floor) or paint can help prevent fading—which will happen no matter if your door faces the beating sun, has a dark finish, or has no reflecting overhang. Keep that protective coat fresh, says Tim O'Malley, general contractor. Tom likes, and the finish will look good indefinitely.

### CONS

• **It might not fit.** Thinking of installing a fiberglass slab into an opening that's not square? Make sure in advance that you can make allowances. Some fiberglass doors can't be trimmed at all. Others can be trimmed only along the top and bottom. Even doors that can be planed on all four sides usually can't be trimmed by more than half an inch on each edge.

• **It can crack.** A fiberglass door won't dent, but the skin can crack if it takes a hard hit from an errant golf ball or gets banged up during the delivery of your new range. Also, delamination—the skin peeling away from the frame—can occur with doors that have woodfills and mold, which will absorb water and rot if not kept sealed with paint or varnish.

• **It negates the one-of-a-kind option.** Unless you're willing to shell out \$30,000 to \$30,000 or more to have a factory create a unique mold for you, you'll end up picking and choosing from all the available standard sizes, options, and extras.

## THE COMPETITION

Here's how the top-selling door materials compare

**WOOD:** It's hard to argue with the natural beauty, warmth, and authenticity of wood, and you can plane down the door's edges if the house settles. Today's laminated veneers and engineered-lumber cores reduce the notorious problems of swelling and sticking. But wood exterior doors remain vulnerable to sun and rain and will rot if you don't keep up with the caulking and the painting or varnishing.

**STEEL:** They represent the lowest-cost option and still command the greatest market share. But if you want an authentic wood look, metal skin doors can't challenge the realism of fiberglass. Plus, steel skins are subject to dents and discolor and can be hot or cold to the touch. The best steel products are galvanized, but if the coating wears off, the door can rust in areas where salt air or frequent rain can cause fiberglass to lose its edge on durability.



**SECURITY DONE** Watch a video of Tom Sells installing a security device on a door at [www.fiberglassdoor.com](http://www.fiberglassdoor.com)

## Get the look

A door doesn't have to hail from the salvage yard to have vintage cred. Manufacturers offer a wide range of period-inspired styles

1- **CRAFTSMAN** Look for recessed panels, wood grain texture, and period details like dentil shelves and patterned and leaded glass lights. The gray-painted door was inspired by Maine's South-Downs Farmstead Shovel. Further, this factory-finished door (\$229 [grethung]) features a set core.

2- **COLONIAL** Molded wood panels suggest the look of wood. But because fiberglass won't expand or contract, they won't need rescaling. Shown: the panel slab door with wood grain texture fiberglass skin and factory-applied paint, from \$480 (pella.com)

3- **VICTORIAN** A pronounced side grain pattern and tall arched lights give this door a late 19th-century look. Shown: Aurora Custom Fiberglass Collection Model A122 door, starting at \$4,800 (grethung). [jett.wm.com](http://jett.wm.com)

4- **CONTEMPORARY** Group geometric lines give this modern-looking door a clean, modern look. Shown: an door with a glass insert from the Pulse collection, from \$449 (grethung) (a paint ready) (thermador.com)

5- **SPANISH MISSION** A dark stain, optional iron strap hinges, and a Spanish-style window grille give this 19th-century look a rustic appearance. Shown: Factory-finished door from about \$1,730 (grethung.com)

6- **NEOClassical** A mahogany look, classical motifs, and right-molded panels lend an air of formality. Shown: Center Archival with a factory-finish (\$552 [grethung]) (pella.com)

7- **COTTAGE** Tempered glass tops a leaded panel. Shown: Paint-ready slab, about \$429 (maconline.com)

8- **TUDOR** This English-inspired arch-top door is also available with strap hinges and ready for a Southwestern look. Shown: Classic Craft Plastic Collection door with factory-applied finish, about \$1,089 (grethung) (thermador.com)



## Before you order... Know your specs inside out

• **Size** Companies stock many options within a standard range, typically in 36-, 44-, and 56-inch heights and 2-inch width increments. For a prehung unit, you'll need the dimensions of the rough opening, and the total depth of the wall to determine jamb widths. To order a slab, measure the height, width, and thickness of the door it is replacing and choose a stock unit to match.

• **Swing** From the outside, facing an exterior door that swings inward (as most residential doors do). If the hinges are on the right-hand side, it's a right-handed door, and vice versa.



Manufacturers offer a wide variety of color, textured, laminated and low-gloss. Slab door is shown. Pulse collection prehung and paint-ready door, starting at \$300 (therma-clad.com)

• **Safety** For extra security, you can order a prehung fiberglass door with a factory-installed three-point locking system, behind-the-jamb metal brackets, and a steel plate in the core. In hurricane zones, make sure your door meets the impact requirements specified by local building codes.

## GOOD, BETTER, BEST

Fiberglass can match the look—and cost—of wood. How a door is made distinguishes good value from top-of-the-line.



### GOOD

**JELD WOODPRO SERIES**  
(\$200–\$1,500)  
Putty like "direct molding compound" is stamped under high heat and pressure into a fiberglass frame that flexes just like wood. Slabs are thick (3/4 inch) laminated veneer lumber (LVL), capped with composite for not rot resistance. Slabs are full composite.



### BETTER

**JELD WINDSOR HYDROTHERMAL FIBERGLASS**  
(\$1,500–\$4,000)  
Long-stem fiberglass is machine-pressed into a viscous matrix and then reinforced with steel. Four-inch-thick LVL slabs are capped with a hardened edge band. Slabs are composite.



### BEST

**JELD WINDSOR CUSTOM FIBERGLASS**  
(\$1,500–\$4,000)  
Thick fiberglass sheets are layered by hand into the glass-in-mold and vacuum-pressed. Four-inch-thick LVL slabs and caps have a hardened edge band. Finishes have approval for an authentic look.



**PRO ADVICE**  
"If the fiberglass skin cracks, you can use Bregma to fill the gap. While the filler is still wet, use a sharp pencil to mimic the door's grain and sand the hardened patch lightly and refinish the entire door."

—TIMOTHY TON GENERAL CONTRACTOR

## Finishing tips

• **For a painted finish**, order a smooth skin fiberglass door either factory finished in the color of your choice or primed. Prime paint it with a high quality exterior grade paint as you would a wood door.

• **For a stained-wood finish**, choose a door with the grain texture of the species you want to simulate: oak for mahogany or alder for example. Factory finishes are applied and cured in ways that can't be duplicated at home and give you the toughest longest-lasting results.

• **For DIY staining**, stick with the stain it provided or designed by the manufacturer for use on the door you order. It contains all the materials you need, and you'll be sure that the products are compatible with the door.

## Special features

When run-of-the-mill won't do, little extras like leaded glass, ornamental grilles, custom moldings, and hand-applied finishes give these factory-made doors an aesthetic edge.

### SPLIT DECISION

Many manufacturers offer the option of turning an entry door with a center rail into a Dutch-style door. Two panel Model AL200 prehung door, with Knotty Alder grain from the Auster Custom Fiberglass Collection, starting at \$4,100; jeld-w.com



### CURVES AHEAD

Don't assume you'll cut offside if the door goes with fiberglass with a fiberglass model veneer. In the lower rectangle, Shown: Right panel radius (top-left) AL300 prehung door, with Knotty Alder grain from the Auster Custom Fiberglass Collection, starting at \$4,500; jeld-w.com



### ORNAMENTAL METALWORK

Just up a plain entry with decorative hinges, door handles, or nothel from. The wrought-iron grille design gives the door Sander District style Shown: Estate Cherry wood-grain fiberglass slab door with Byzantium finish, from ELABO-glass.com



### DECORATIVE WINDOWS

Companies offer transoms, sidelights and decorative glass to complement your fiberglass door Shown: Draftman prehung double door with Horseshoe windows and transoms \$4,240-plus case

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71  
tips, tricks, and  
answers to  
your home-  
improvement  
questions



**Q** Our window is square, but  
the trim around it is not.  
Is there a fix? —MICHAEL JENKINS, BIRMINGHAM

**A** Yes, after you pry off the old trim. The window is  
square, so all you need to align the new trim is a  
try square, like the ones above. Lay the square's  
blade on the edge of a jamb with the end of the  
handle butted against the jamb's inside face.  
Strike lines on the jamb edge, using the blade as  
a guide, and repeat on the two other jambs. Now  
just set the inside edges of the new trim on these  
lines. It will be square and have a nice reveal.

—TOMMIEA TSH SENIOR CONTRACTOR

PHOTOGRAPH  
BY RUBEN FETOV

Our cast  
of veteran  
expertsTOM SILVA  
General ContractorMARK ADAMS  
Master CarpenterRICHARD TRETHEWEY  
Plumbing and Heating  
ExpertDREW COOK  
Landscape ContractorKEVIN O'CONNOR  
Field

My driveway is so steep that we can't get up it when it snows, so I'm thinking about putting in radiant heat. Good idea?

—DAVID WILSON, HUNTINGTON, CONN.



**RICHARD TRETHEWEY REPLIES** Sounds like your drive is a perfect candidate for an in-pavement snow-melting system. During a storm, it'll heat up the surface to just above freezing, preventing any accumulation of snow or ice.

A snow-melting system uses hydronic tubing, low-voltage electrical cables, or low-voltage cables. (I can't recommend the latter because they don't last more than 15 years or so.) If you don't have natural-gas service to fire the boiler—which heats the glycol-water mix circulating through the tubing of a hydronic system—then electric is your only option. The cables can be installed into grooves cut into the pavement, at an installation cost of \$30 to \$40 per square foot, not including any upgrade to the electrical service that may be required.

With a hydronic system, you have to rip out the driveway and replace it in order to put in the tubing, but even then the installation is less expensive, about \$18 to \$25 per square foot. Those figures don't include the cost of a boiler. If you have one with enough capacity, you might be able to tap into it. Otherwise you'll need an efficient condensing unit that heats only your driveway.

There's no limit to the size of the drive you can heat with either method, as long as the system delivers enough flow (125 gpm square foot) or water (36 gpm square foot) to keep the pavement above freezing

during a storm. Both systems crank up the heat only when sensors embedded in the driveway detect both cold temperatures and moisture. And they'll keep working until the pavement is dry.

Here's the bottom line: At about 12 cents per kilowatt-hour, the average price for electricity in the U.S., a low-voltage system that takes nine hours to clear a 1,000-square-foot drive will cost around \$40 per snow-fall. But with the average price of natural gas running about 1.2 cents per cubic foot, a hydronic system working under the same conditions on the same driveway will cost only about \$14 per snow-fall. Given the lower installation and operating costs, you'll come out ahead with a hydronic system.

**Fireplace face-lift**  
I'd like to replace our painted-brick fireplace surround with either glass or marble tile. Should I go after it with a jackhammer?

—GREG PHILLIPS, CLANTON, MICH.

**KEVIN O'CONNOR REPLIES** I took your question to field contractor Mark Ferrante, who has been laying tile for *The Old House* TV projects for more than 20 years. Here's what he had to say:

"You've got the right idea, but a jackhammer is overkill for this project. For tile, the best approach is to chip off the stone veneer and start with a fresh cement-board surface. You can rent a lightweight rotary hammer fitted with a wide flat chisel, and that should do the trick."

Start by protecting the floor and hearth at the surround's base. Pile up Masonite sheets duct-taped together. Then, pull off the mortar; it's probably crumbled to the wall.

With the mortar gone, you'll be

What  
is it?

1. **Mouthguard**  
for use with  
jackhammer

2. **Concrete**  
grout for  
control joints

3. **Spacer**  
for  
decking

4. **Hand dibble**  
for seeds

FOR THE  
ANSWERS  
SEE PAGE 52

Enough stone fireplace surround can be removed with a jackhammer with the help of cement board, plaster, and masonry screws.

able to see what the stone is stuck to—probably brick or concrete block. Set the chisel between this substrate and the veneer mortar and pull the trigger on the hammer. Working from the top down, you can peel off the stone and mortar in no time. Take extra care around the fireplace so that you don't crack or chip the exposed bricks.

"When the stone is all gone and cleared away, attach 1/2" sheetrock to the concrete and edges of the surround—including around the fireplace—using 25-inch flat-head concrete anchors, such as Tapcons (tapcon.com). Drill a 25-inch-deep pilot hole for each screw, using a masonry bit. Blow debris out of each hole with a turkey baster before driving the screws partway in. Check the spacing to make sure the pieces are flush, the pieces are flush, and the corners are square. Start as needed, then drive the screws tight."

"Now attach the cement board to the sheetrock with 1/8-inch concrete board screws, and tape all the joints with fiberglass-mesh cement-board tape. Fill the joints with latex-modified thinset, and the next day you can start tiling."

"Once the tile is up, you may be

able to put back the original mantel. But you'll probably have to take off the bottom molding piece and install the mantel's bottom edge to make it fit over the new surround. Replace the mantel, cover its bottom edge with new molding, then set back and enjoy your 'new' fireplace."

**Sold in the attic**

I was in the attic to check for ice-dam damage and found black mold growing on the underside of the roof. I don't know why, there are vents at the ridge, soffits, and gables. What should I do?

—BRAD DOUGLASS, NASHUA, N.H.

**TOM SILVA REPLIES** First, get rid of the mold. That is a tough job to do properly, so I recommend turning the work over to a certified mold-remediation company. One very effective technique I've seen uses dry-air pillows to blast away mold. It's quick and clean and doesn't heat the wood.

Next, fix the problem that caused the mold to grow in the first place: a lack of even ventilation. I suspect

Continued on page 52

A snow-melting system needs a sensor like the one embedded in this pavement to know when to heat it up.

QUESTION  
OF THE  
MONTH

Our old doors still have their antique locks, but no keys.  
Can I get keys that work? —NANCY COONE, STARK, N.H.

**MASTER LOCKSMITH LAURY COONAN REFLECTS:** Of course you can! And, most likely, one key to fit you'll need because the two rooms on old houses typically share identical locks.

The first step is to remove one of the locks and take it to an engraver or me or a locksmith that has a collection of old-bit keys.

often called skeleton keys. If you're lucky, you'll find a key that actually slides into the keyhole and throws the bolt, and your quest will be over.

If not, look for a bit-key blank that's a close fit and follow the steps shown here to cut the key so that it operates the lock. It's a simple job with a vice and a few tools, bringing an old lock back to life.

**1 Remove the lock.** Loosen the set screw on one door knob and twist or pull it off the spindle. Then pull the other knob and the attached spindle out of the hub. Cut through the paint around the faceplate and remove the screws, as shown. Stick the screwdriver through the spindle hub and pop the lock out of the door.



**2 Work the bolt.** Remove the cover of the lock case. Using your thumb to hold the locking lever against the bolt, insert the key from below and turn it, as shown. The bit should push the lever out of the way and retract the bolt. If it hangs up on the bolt, file a shallow notch in the bit's bottom edge so that it turns freely in both directions.

**3 Fit the tip to the keyhole.** Find a blank with a tip diameter that fits into the top of the keyhole on each side of the lock. If the key is rectangular blade—called a bit—go left and turn but don't throw the bit; go to Step 5. Otherwise, proceed to Step 3.



**4 Notch the bit's edges.** Inside the case's cover, alongside the keyhole, look for tiny bumps, called wards. (See step 7 photo.) Pass the bit through the keyhole and mark where it contacts the wards. Then insert the key a slip from the opposite direction and mark where the wards hit the bit's other edge. Clamp the key in a vise and file two notches in the bit, as shown.

**5 Fit the bit to the keyhole.** If the bit is too long, mark where it hits the bottom of the keyhole. Using a file or a bench grinder, as shown, remove just enough metal from the bit's lower edge for the bit to pass through the keyhole on both sides of the lock.



**6 Test the key.** Insert the key through the keyhole from below, as shown, and turn the bit. The notches should pass freely over the wards when you twist the key in either direction. Flip the key around and test the notches on the opposite side, too.

**7 Fit the bit to the lock case.** Now check the bit's width by moving the wooden handle of the shaft—the stop—against the edge of the case, as shown. (The stop must project past the other side.) Mark where the bit's front and back edges need trimming for it to turn inside the case. File these edges to fit.



**8 Reassemble and replace.** Dust out the lock's case and spray it with a penetrating lubricant, such as WD-40, as shown. Replace the cover and make sure the key throws the bolt from both sides. Thread all the lock's internal screws, replace the faceplate, and replace the spindle and knob. Then put your key at a side table place.

Cost: \$5 per key blank  
Time: 20 minutes  
Difficulty: Easy. The trick is finding a blank that has a shaft of the right diameter.



**TO GET** senior technical editor Mark Prewett had this bit key made to get his old door locks working again.



that air is entering the attic mostly through the gable vents when it should be coming in only through the soffit vents. That probably contributed to the ice dams, left the shingling damp, and gave the mold a chance to take hold. The solution is to seal up the gable vents and leave a clear path for air to move from the soffits to the ridge. No ventilation should be blocking the soffit.

But don't stop there. Make sure your attic insulation meets the R-value recommended for your climate. Seal any gaps that allow wind or air to enter the attic, and remove any ducts that extend into that space. If you don't take these precautions, the mold will be back next year.

**Asbes for the garden**  
We heat our house by burning wood—about 15 face cords of oak

per season. Is it okay to put the ashes in our garden?

—LEE KUMASZ, MELLISVILLE, MD

**ROGER COOK REPLIES** Wow, that must be a lot of ashes. Fortunately, they do contain minerals that are good for soil in gardens as well as lawns. There's potassium, calcium and phosphate, both fertilizing and micronutrients, including iron, boron, and zinc. But the biggest component of wood ash, about 25 percent by weight, is calcium carbonate, the same stuff used to increase soil alkalinity.

So first, test your soil. Unless you're growing plants like blueberries and potatoes, which prefer acidic conditions, ash can be added to soils with a pH of 6.5 or less and low potassium levels. Hold off if the pH is 7. Don't lagher or the potassium level is 160 parts per million (ppm) or higher. The

extra ash would make it harder for most plants to absorb the nutrients they need.

Assuming your soil is in the right range, you can add up to 20 pounds of dry, powdery ash per 100 square feet. Wait for a calm day and wear a dust mask. Spread it evenly and work it in to a depth of 6 inches. On lawns, where you can't work it in, apply 10 pounds per 1,000 square feet. Don't leave clumps and don't sprinkle ashes on new seeds or seedlings. Ash can be put down every year, as long as you confirm that the soil's pH and potassium levels are okay.

Ashes are good for compost, too. They add nutrients and keep the pile from becoming too acidic, which slows down the decomposition process.

By the way, the ash from cardboard, coal, or charcoal is not soil-friendly. And don't even think about burning painted, finished, or pressure-treated wood.

## Rusty lolly

The steel posts holding up the main beams in our basement have large rust spots where they go into the concrete floor. Can I repair them or should they be replaced? If I were to replace them, what would that involve?

—CHRISTOPHER, SOUTHEAST MISS

**TOM SILVA REPLIES** Those posts, often called lolly columns, are thin-walled steel pipes filled with concrete. They're rusting because moisture below the slab is wicking up the corner of each column and corroding the steel jacket from the inside out.

As long as the concrete inside a column isn't exposed, you can scrape off the big rust flakes, sand the remaining rust down to bright metal, then prime and paint the affected areas. That's a constant, stopgap measure that won't stop the steel from rust-

ing in the future. But if you can see concrete where you get rid of the rust, the columns must be replaced.

First, provide temporary structural supports for the beams on both sides of the columns being removed. Then cut through the metal at the base of the columns using a cold chisel or a recip saw with a long bevel blade. The columns will be heavy, so be sure to have a helper to keep it from crushing down on you.

After the column is out, use a grinder to remove any concrete or metal sticking above the surface of the slab. To protect the column's metal floor plate from moisture, prime and paint it, then apply a self-adhesive waterproofing membrane to its underside. Put the plate directly over the location of the old column.

Set the new column in place on the plate, plumb it, then drill pilot holes into the

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concrete with a masonry bit and a hammer drill. Secure the plate to the slab with concrete screws. If your columns attach at the top, depends on what the beam is made of. For sawn-wood beams, the plate is screwed or nailed in place. Engineered beams need a saddle plate, which is screwed in place from the sides. Steel beams have a special connecting plate that clips onto their bottom flange.

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Include a complete address and daytime phone number. Photograph questions will be asked for clarity and length and might need further details. We regret that letters in this column of Ask This Old House will be unable to answer unpublished questions.

## Warped-door fix

Q Of the four wood-framed glass-enclosed doors I made, three turned out great but one warped. Can this warp be corrected?

—ROGER BRADICK GRIESELAND, NJ

**TOM SILVA RESPONDS:** You might be able to straighten out that door by “overclamping” it, bending back the warped pieces in the opposite direction.

Lay the door frame, with glass removed, on a table or workbench so that the bow of the warp points up. Place blocks under the spots where the door touches the table, then put one jaw of a bar clamp on each high spot, where the wood has warped upward. Hook the other jaw under the table and gently tighten the clamp until the wood flattens just the point of being straight. Wood bends more easily in warm, humid

conditions, so bring in a humidifier for a few days, if you need to.

Leave the clamps on for about a week, then check to see if the warp is gone. If it isn't, relaxing the door and wait another week or so. With luck, you'll relieve the stresses in the wood that caused the warping at the first place.

If that had good results with this approach, let wood cut get on dry and re-humidify straight. If that's what happens, head back to the shop and build another door.



## GOT ANSWER?

If you have an idea that would improve *Home*—or any of the other shows it's worth a chance to answer it on *Ask This Old House*. E-mail ideas, with this page or to [asktholdhouse.com/yourtoh](mailto:asktholdhouse.com/yourtoh)

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## Norm's tricks of the trade

**The side trim on some of my windows has to be narrower than the head casing. How do I make mitered joints?**

—ANTHONY TANG, PHILADELPHIA

**A** I've encountered this situation when a window or door is too close to a cabinet or wall for full-width side casing to fit. Here's what to do: Cut 45-degree miter at the ends of the head casing and alone end of each side casing, then rip down the sidepieces to the width you need. Now place the miters together and line up the inside edges, as shown. Mark where the outside edge of each sidepiece meets the head casing. Trim the ends of the head casing at these marks with a square, 90-degree cut. The

small portion of end grain that "bumped" when the casing is assembled will be hidden by the wall or cabinet that you're up against.

If the backs of the sidepieces aren't flat, you may have to thin their outside edges to make them flush with the head casing. ■



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
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
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THE 145TH IN 1602: A young soldier named Peter Abelschynskor sailed from Holland on the transatlantic journey to the New World. After being shipwrecked, he arrived in what would eventually become Delaware and was tasked with helping defend a Dutch fort from the Indians. Later he was put in charge of a new mining local land deals, during which time he paid 1,120 guilders (about \$640 today) for a 1,475-acre parcel where Naamansdijk, also named Peter, later built his steady Georgian Baroque home. This circa 1760 house was his me to every Abelschynskor descendant before being sold to outsiders some time in the 1800s.

In 1990, Delaware Wild Lands purchased the house and its remaining 200-acre parcel to protect the property from development. A creek runs along the house until 2014, when the spring is rehabilitated. Now it must be moved to safeguard the nearby marsh as it will be a detrimental by-product of a well.

WFF SAVICITY The landscape contains a variety of birds, including a Florida sandpiper with a brief course between the two floors. House, sandpiper details remain, including woodwork and walls, which are floors.

**WHAT IT NEEDS:** Aside from a permanent plot, the house will need updates to the electrical service, new plumbing, an air heating system. Floor joists on the first level should be reinforced or replaced. But Pennix is hopeful of about \$600, about 20 miles south of Wilmington. Lots in the area start at around \$40,000. Buying and restoring the house is a big job, but well worth it. After all, it's not every day you come across a house as odd that was paid for in zippers. —JAMES HOGAN

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